

# Trainer's Guide

## Module 6.2.5

### Complex communication means



**Presenter's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



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# Table of Contents

1.Introduction.....	3
2.Materials Needed .....	11
3.Slides and Content.....	12



# **1.Introduction**

## **Pragmatics**

Although the formal language of people with IDD is reduced and deficient, it is not devoid of communicative value. Very often, people with IDD have not mastered these basic rules of conversational exchange and Grice's maxims for quality exchange (quality, quantity, relevance, and manner) are not respected.

Aspects of peer communication in institutional and school settings have been documented by several authors. In this framework, the development of competence in verbal communication is defined as the process of acquiring knowledge about how to use and understand language to be sensitive to the goals, sensations and possibilities of other participant. From this perspective, five areas of verbal communication need to be addressed and studied: (1) taking conversational turns, (2) notifying referents in conversation, (3) managing speech acts, (4) partners' contribution to the conversational exchange and managing the topic of conversation, and (5) requests for clarification.

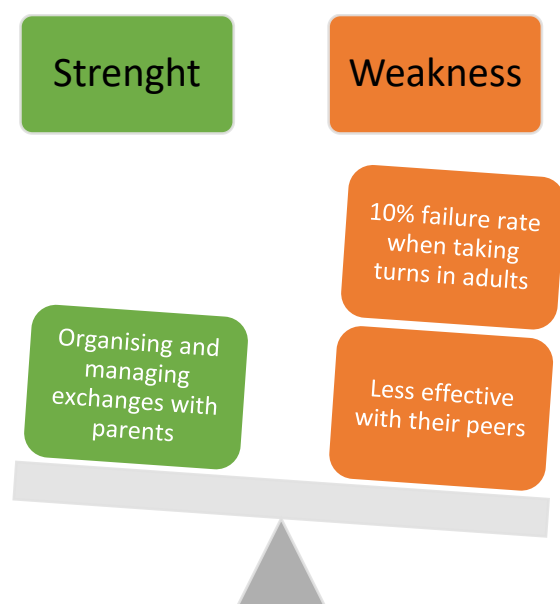
## **Conversational turn-taking**

Turn-taking is essential in interpersonal communication. It represents the communicative experience needed to grasp the rules governing conversational turn-taking. As research in this area shows, people with IDD do not have too many problems in this area, at least in managing and organising exchanges with their parents/relatives.

Problems occur in only 10% of conversational exchanges, which is roughly the same percentage of errors as in neurotypical adults (Abbeduto & Rosenberg, 1980). These data suggest that if pragmatic knowledge poses problems for people with IDD, it does not seem that their origin should be sought in their conversational turn-taking abilities.

The situation can be illustrated as follow:





### Notification of referents in conversation

The success of conversational interactions depends on several factors, including precise notification of the people, places and things to which the speaker refers in his or her discourse.

This aspect of conversation raises the whole issue of the use of deictics (e.g. pronouns, adverbs of place, spatial prepositions), i.e. units present in discourse whose correct interpretation can only be made with reference to the context (e.g. here, behind, now, etc.) or to information previously provided by the speaker (e.g. personal pronouns).

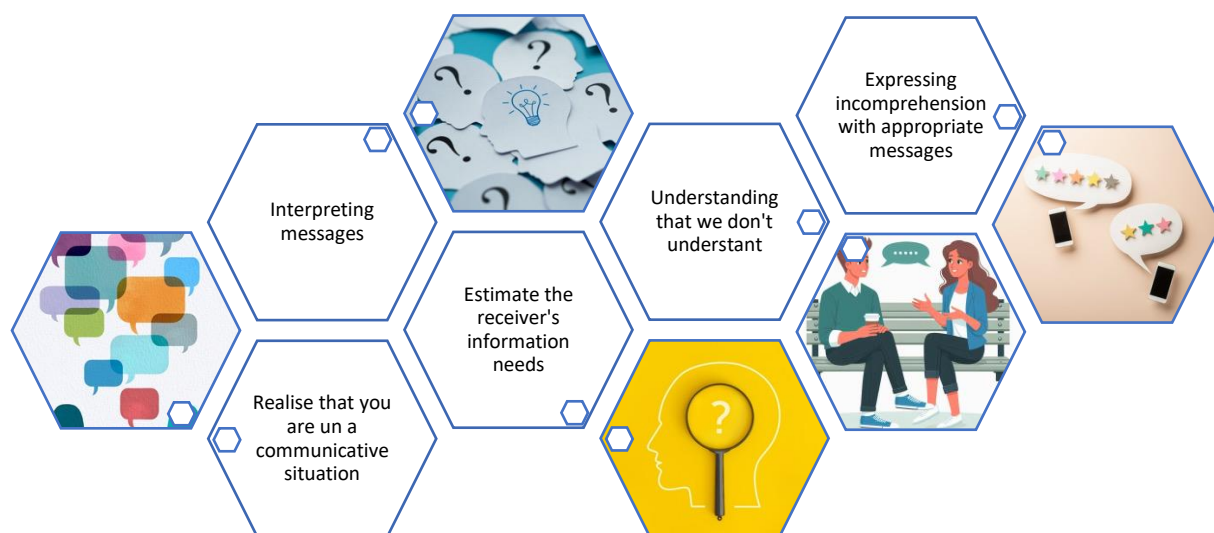
pronouns).

Neurotypical pre-school children recognise the need to adjust their utterances according to the sensory and information-processing abilities of their interlocutors. However, it is only after the age of 7 that they become aware of the need to take account of the conversational situation to construct utterances in which the referent is clearly differentiated from other potential referents in the environment. While neurotypical children seem capable, from the age of 10, of succeeding perfectly in a referential communication task, people with IDD do not master this skill and have considerable difficulty with this type of task. They fail to formulate messages that contain all the information necessary for the speaker to interpret them unambiguously.

Why such difficulties in communicative acts involving referential communication? In addition to the difficulty already mentioned in using deictics (pronouns, determiners, etc.)



appropriately, the IDD person must understand correctly the context in which the exchange is taking place, the information needs of the speaker and his or her own communication needs.



Referential communication tasks provide a way of examining children's sensitivity to the needs of the listener in the communication, and thus of examining the person's potential for successful exchange of information (Comblain & Elbouz, 2002). This type of task usually involves giving information about an object or event to someone who is not present. In practical terms, in everyday life, this could mean a telephone conversation or telling someone about your day who hasn't spent it with you. This kind of tasks also allow to get information on the person's ability to be a good receiver by adjusting the completeness of information given to him by the speaker.

In these tasks or situation, the *efficient speaker* can discriminate the features that uniquely identify an object or an event to be described, to present these features in a coherent message and to exclude unhelpful redundant information. Furthermore, good speakers engage and maintain the attention of the receiver and can modify their message if the receiver indicates that he is unable to select the target-item or exhibit a failure of comprehension. The *efficient receiver* is one who can, following an accurate message, give the appropriate response. When messages are not complete (for example, they refer to more than one item), it is interesting to observe how they deal with this inadequacy. Can they frame the type of questions that are ordinarily used in telling another that one is unable to act on the received message?

Speaker skills typically develop before receiver skills in contrast to the normal pattern for language development where comprehension is said to precede production (Lloyd, 1994).

In a study conducted with Fragile-X boys, Comblain and Elbouz (2002) showed that these participants can be efficient speakers and receivers but that the efficiency of the communication depends on the nature of the information to communicate. Confirming Lambert and von Kaenel (1984) obtained with Down's syndrome participant, they point out that the ability of TDI speakers to provide relevant information to receivers is closely dependent on the amount and type of information to be provided. Difficulties mainly appear with spatial and ordinal information implying the mastery of vocabulary and concepts which seems to be deficient in most IDD persons.

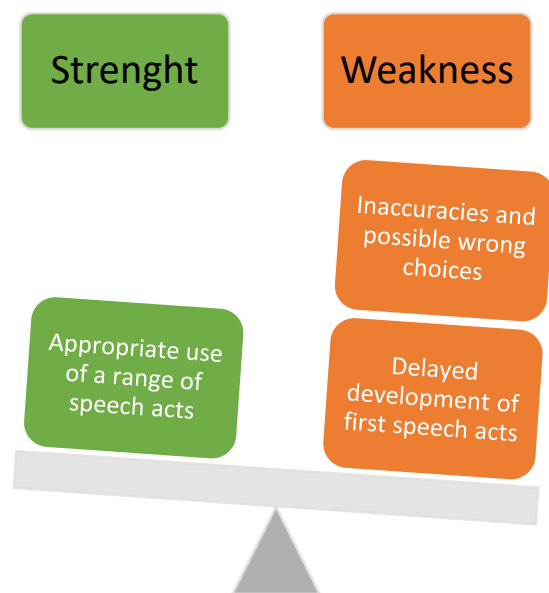
### Managing speech acts

The production of language during an interaction is a social act by which the speaker tries to influence the other participants in the conversation. The speaker asks questions, asserts propositions, orders, exclaims, and so on. Children's knowledge of these speech acts is not complete before the age of 8 or 9, even though they are able to identify some of them from the age of 2 or 3.

Children with IDD already show a delay in the development of these first speech acts (Abbeduto, 1991). However, this delay does not seem to prevent IDD adults from being able to produce all the basic categories of speech acts produced by neurotypical adults. Mild to moderate IDD adults can effectively produce statements, questions, give orders and express an idea (Rosenberg & Abbeduto, 1980). In some situations, however, the choice of speech form is imprecise. For example, in the case of requests, the choice of polite form is more rarely made than in the case of neurotypical children or people (e.g.: "another sweet" is preferred to "can I have another sweet?").

The situation can be illustrated as follow:





## Organising the topic of conversation

In a conversation, participants identify a topic of mutual interest about which they exchange ideas. This type of behaviour has been studied very little in people with IDD. Abbeduto and Rosenberg (1980) suggest from research on three triads of adults with IDD that the organisation of the topic of conversation is well developed. Their work is based on calculating the consecutive number of turns of speech on the same subject. However, an analysis of the content of the exchanges shows that Abbeduto and Rosenberg's subjects use a lot of interjections and fillers (for example, oh, mm, hmm, etc.) to maintain interaction. These productions have no semantic meaning and provide no information about the subject of the conversation. In fact, IDDerers maintain the interaction but most often fail to advance the topic of conversation and the exchange of ideas.

Furthermore, when they do not understand the content of the exchange or its objective, they very rarely make requests for clarification (e.g. ask questions, request rephrasing, etc.).

The difficulty in managing acts of communication and maintaining a conversation in a constructive and informative manner is undoubtedly because understanding an utterance is not just a matter of understanding what is said explicitly: we must consider the implicit content of any communicative intervention, a content that is only accessible by recovering the speaker's intention. To account for this process, Grice (1979) introduces the notion of intention



in communication and develops four principles of communication that the speaker follows to communicate with an interlocutor. These are commonly referred to as Grice's Maxims.

From this point of view, the basis of successful communication rests on a principle of cooperation. From this point of view, the basis of successful communication rests on a principle of cooperation: each of the participants in the conversation endeavours to make a rational and cooperative contribution to the discourse to facilitate the interpretation of the statements.

### Cooperation principle - adjustment to the general direction of the conversation



If I'm asked to take part in a ball game. I am free to accept or refuse. If I accept, I must listen to the rules of the game before I can take part in the activity.

→ my interventions must be made at the right moment in the conversation

**Incorrect:** interrupt the instructor's explanations or speak at the same time as my playmates

**Correct:** wait until the end of the explanation to ask a question or ask for repetition

Effective participation in the conversation must also take account of the various principles (maxims) governing relations between participants: (1) maxim of quantity, (2) maxim of quality, (3) maxim of relation or relevance and (4) maxim of manner or modality.

### Maxim of quality

Each speaker should give as much information as necessary and no more. Insufficient information or a lack of information is detrimental to the conversation, just as much more information than necessary can also be detrimental to the conversation. The conversation can deviate towards unimportant details, or the participants can be led to erroneous conclusions.

### Maxim of quantity - Don't give too much or too little information



Jean is amused and laughs. He tells his parents about his day and wants to explain that he and his friends have been playing football and that when the ball was kicked too hard, it landed outside the play area in the neighbour's garden.

**Incorrect:** It was too hard, so the ball fell into the flowers.

→ Jean's intervention contains too little information for his parents to understand the situation and laugh with him.





**Correct:** We played football at school, and I shot too hard and the ball landed in the neighbour's flowers.

### *Maxim of quantity*

Any contribution to the conversation must meet the conditions of truthfulness and soundness. This implies that each participant in the conversation must be sincere and speak with good reason. In other words, participants must have good reasons for saying what they say and evidence to support their statements.

#### **Maxims of quality and relation - Don't say anything false or irrelevant**



The educator asks Jean, who has put the cookery book away in the kitchen after the baking activity. Jean had not taken part in the cooking activity and so could not answer the question.

**Incorrect:** Anna took it away. It's on the table.

→ Jean's comment is irrelevant: (1) it does not answer the question and (2) he cannot answer it because he wasn't taking part to the activity.

**Correct:** I don't know I didn't take part in the activity.

### *Maxim of modality/manner*

For communication to be effective, it is important to communicate clearly and avoid any unnecessary ambiguity or complexity.

#### **Maxim of modality/manner - Be clear, avoid ambiguity, be brief and orderly.**



Jean tells his parents that he has been talking to his friends Paul and James and that James has invited him to his birthday party.

**Incorrect:** I met Paul and James. He invited me to his birthday party.

→ We don't know who the pronoun "he" refers to. There is therefore some ambiguity in the text, since "he" can refer to Paul or James.

**Correct:** I met Paul and James. James invited me to his birthday party.

Each time an utterance is produced, the speaker and the receiver must cooperate to move the exchange towards a common goal: the transmission of information.



The speaker and receiver implicitly consider that the other respects the principle of cooperation.

Communication is effective and the rules of the communicative act are respected when: all the necessary and sufficient information for understanding what is being said is provided, the speaker expresses it clearly, what is being said is accurate and relevant to the topic of conversation.

In some cases, they however must make assumptions about the meaning of what is said and fill in potential gaps in information by making inferences.

## Bibliography

- Abbeduto, L. (1991). Development of Verbal Communication in Persons with Moderate to Mild Mental Retardation. In N. W. Bray (Éd.), *International Review of Research in Mental Retardation* (Vol. 17, p. 91-115). Academic Press. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0074-7750\(08\)60104-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0074-7750(08)60104-4)
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## **2.Materials Needed**

The slides for this presentation (COM-IN\_PR3\_6\_2\_5\_Pragmatics\_EN.pptx)

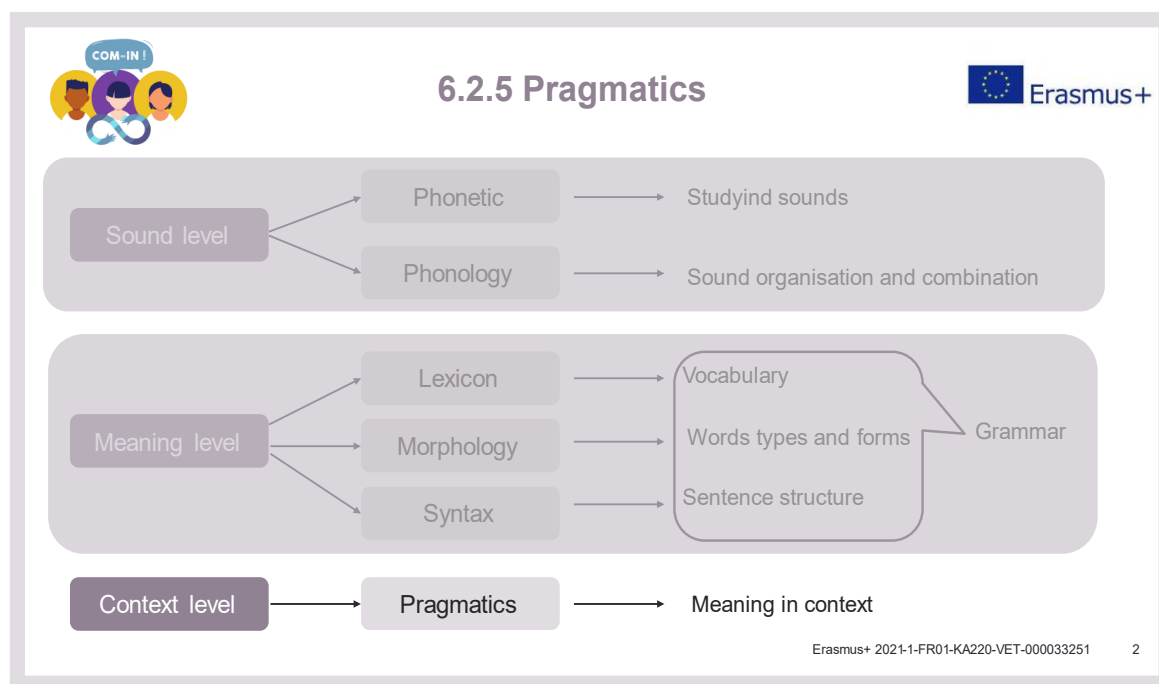
A Video projector



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### 3.Slides and Content

#### Slide n°2

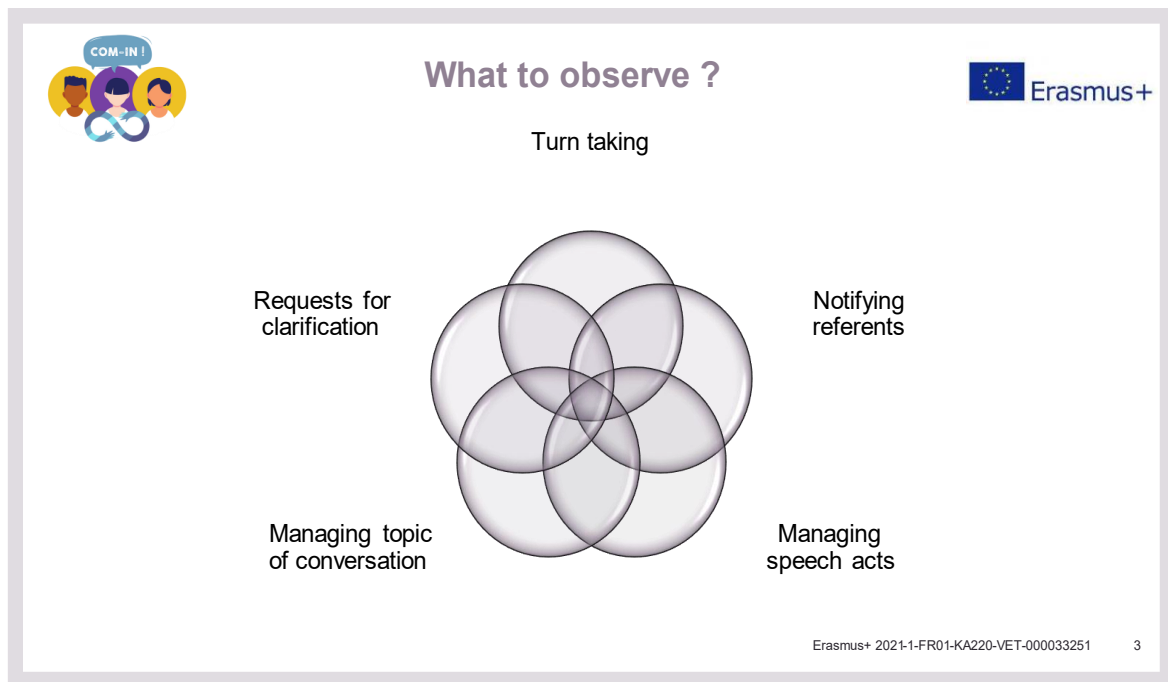


#### Content:

Although the formal language of people with IDD is reduced and deficient, it is not devoid of communicative value.

#### Notes :

## Slide n°3



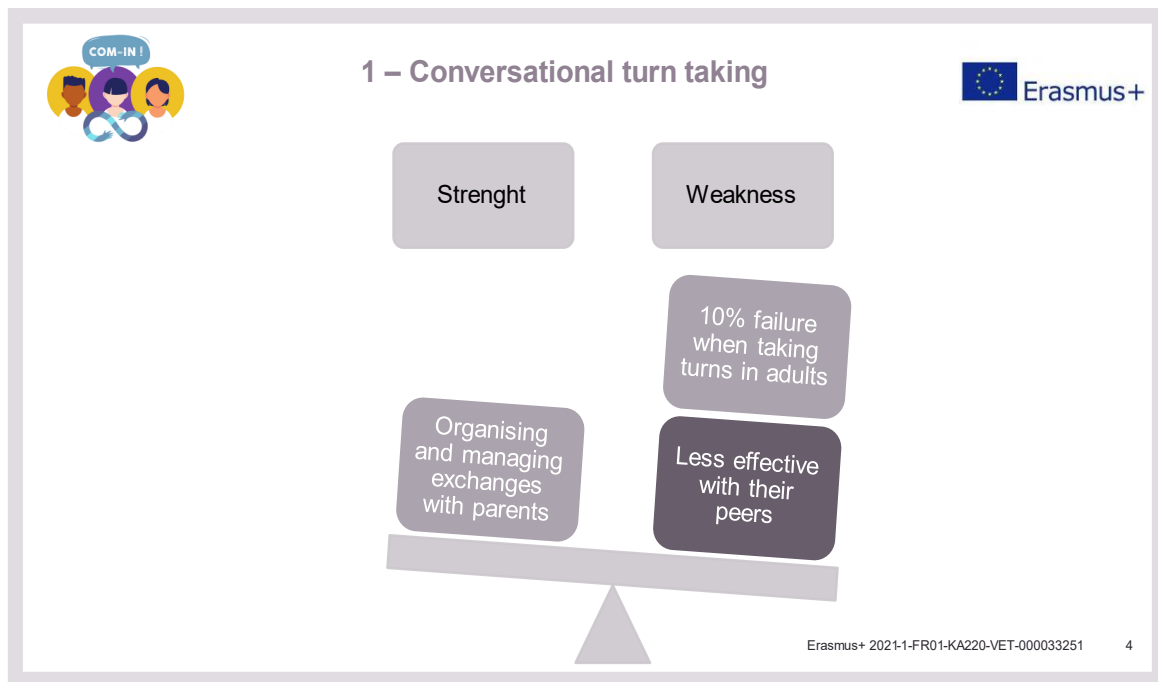
### Content:

Aspects of peer communication in institutional and school settings have been documented by several authors. In this framework, the development of competence in verbal communication is defined as the process of acquiring knowledge about how to use and understand language to be sensitive to the goals, sensations and possibilities of another participant. From this perspective, five areas of verbal communication need to be addressed and studied: (1) taking conversational turns, (2) notifying referents in conversation, (3) managing speech acts, (4) partners' contribution to the conversational exchange and managing the topic of conversation, and (5) requests for clarification.

### Notes :



## Slide n°4



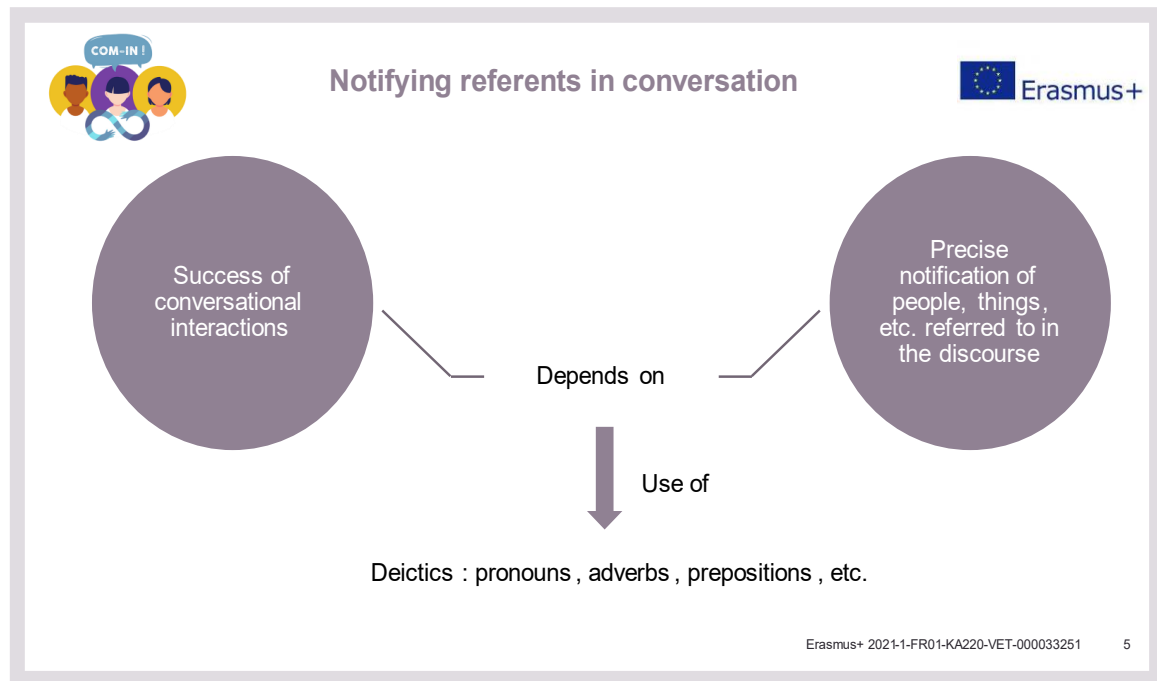
### Content:

- Turn-taking is essential in interpersonal communication. It represents the communicative experience needed to grasp the rules governing conversational turn-taking. As research in this area shows, people with IDD do not have too many problems in this area, at least in managing and organising exchanges with their parents/relatives.
- Problems occur in only 10% of conversational exchanges, which is roughly the same percentage of errors as in neurotypical adults (Abbeduto & Rosenberg, 1980). These data suggest that if pragmatic knowledge poses problems for people with IDD, it does not seem that their origin should be sought in their conversational turn-taking abilities.



## Notes :

### Slide n°5



### Content:



The success of conversational interactions depends on several factors, including precise notification of the people, places and things to which the speaker refers in his or her discourse.

This aspect of conversation raises the whole issue of the use of deictics (e.g. pronouns, adverbs of place, spatial prepositions), i.e. units present in discourse whose correct interpretation can only be made with reference to the context (e.g. here, behind, now, etc.) or to information previously provided by the speaker (e.g. personal pronouns).



## Notes :


### Slide n°6




#### In typical child

7 yrs → aware of the need to take account of the conversational situation and to clearly identify and differentiated the referents

10 yrs → success in referential communication tasks



#### In IDD



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### Content:

Neurotypical pre-school children recognise the need to adjust their utterances according to the sensory and information-processing abilities of their interlocutors. However, it is only after the age of 7 that they become aware of the need to take account of the conversational situation to construct utterances in which the referent is clearly differentiated from other potential referents in the environment.

While neurotypical children seem capable, from the age of 10, of succeeding perfectly in a referential communication task, people with IDD do not master this skill and have considerable difficulty with this type of task.







They fail to formulate messages that contain all the information necessary for the speaker to interpret them unambiguously.


NB: a referential communication task consists of separating two people by an opaque screen. One person has to get the other to guess what is in front of them, or to reproduce a drawing or a cube construction.

### Notes :


### Slide n°7



Experimental design of referential communication tasks



What does this mean in everyday life?



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### Content:



Referential communication tasks provide a way of examining children's sensitivity to the needs of the listener in the communication, and thus of examining the person's potential for successful exchange of information.



This type of task usually involves giving information about an object or event to someone who is not present. In practical terms, in everyday life, this could mean a telephone conversation or telling someone about your day who hasn't spent it with you. This kind of tasks also allow to get information on the person's ability to be a good receiver by adjusting the completeness of information given to him by the speaker.

**Notes :**

## Slide n°8



### The efficient speaker

**Differentiate between referents and distracters**

- 5 yrs (mental age): compares referents and non-referents but cannot apply this knowledge to RC situations

**Takes the listener into account**

- 6 yrs mental age: adapts language to the listener, whether an adult or another child

**Dose information quantitatively and qualitatively according to the context**

- redundant messages if the referent is complex or if the receiver has difficulty understanding the message

### The efficient receiver

**5 years:** little understanding of the role of the message

- Does not understand that a message is ambiguous
- Does not understand that failure to communicate may be due to lack of information provided by the speaker

**6 years:** prefers contrasting messages that are not too redundant

**8 years:** ability to detect inadequacies and ambiguities in the message

**10 years:** benefit from redundant messages that they know how to use

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## Content:

In these tasks or situation, the *efficient speaker* can discriminate the features that uniquely identify an object or an event to be described, to present these

features in a coherent message and to exclude unhelpful redundant information. Furthermore, good speakers engage and maintain the attention of the receiver and can modify their message if the receiver indicates that he is unable to select the target-item or exhibit a failure of comprehension.

The *efficient receiver* is one who can, following an accurate message, give the appropriate response. When messages are not complete (for example, they refer to more than one item), it is interesting to observe how they deal with this inadequacy. Can they frame the type of questions that are ordinarily used in telling another that one is unable to act on the received message?

Speaker skills typically develop before receiver skills in contrast to the normal pattern for language development where comprehension is said to precede production (Lloyd, 1994).

**Notes :**

**Slide n°9**





## The main problems encountered by people with IDD in referential communication tasks



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9

### Content:

Why such difficulties in communicative acts involving referential communication? In addition to the difficulty already mentioned in using deictics (pronouns, determiners, etc.) appropriately, the IDD person must understand correctly the context in which the exchange is taking place, the information needs of the speaker and his or her own communication needs.

In a study conducted with Fragile-X boys, Comblain and Elbouz (2002) showed that these participants can be efficient speakers and receivers but that the efficiency of the communication depends on the nature of the information to communicate.

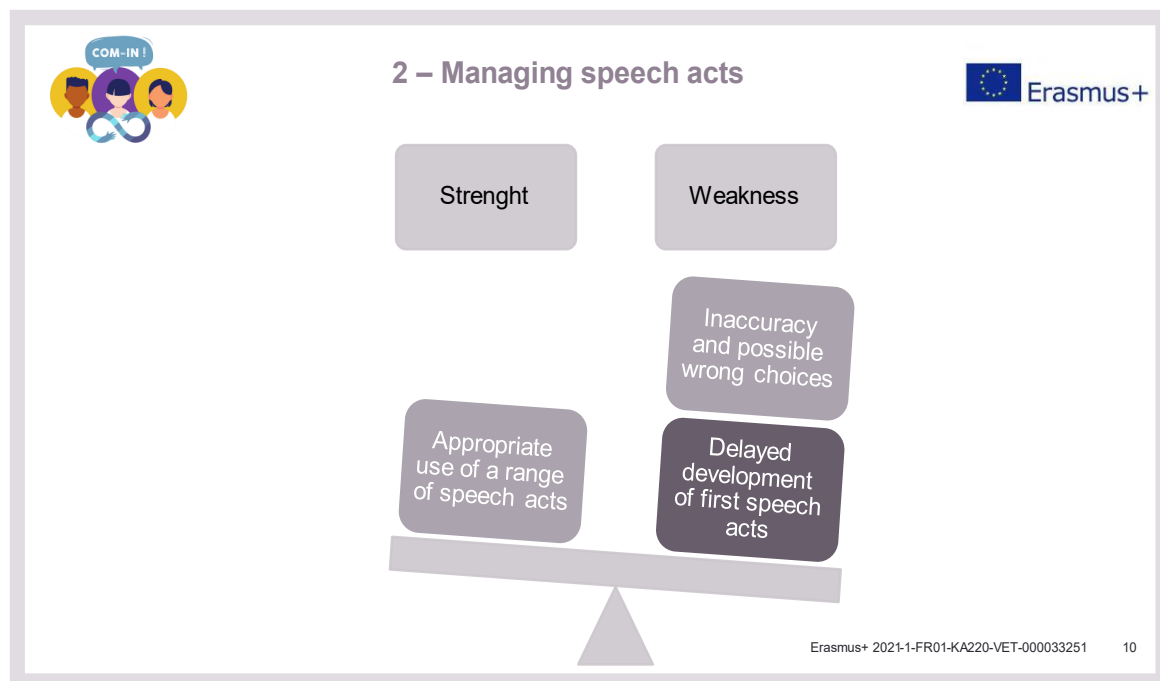
The ability of TDI speakers to provide relevant information to receivers is closely dependent on the amount and type of information to be provided. Difficulties mainly appear with spatial and ordinal information implying the



mastery of vocabulary and concepts which seems to be deficient in most IDD persons.

**Notes :**

## Slide n°10



### Content:

The production of language during an interaction is a social act by which the speaker tries to influence the other participants in the conversation. The speaker asks questions, asserts propositions, orders, exclaims, and so on. Children's knowledge of these speech acts is not complete before the age of 8 or 9, even though they are able to identify some of them from the age of 2 or 3.



Children with IDD already show a delay in the development of these first speech acts. However, this delay does not seem to prevent IDD adults from being able to produce all the basic categories of speech acts produced by neurotypical adults. Mild to moderate IDD adults can effectively produce statements, questions, give orders and express an idea . In some situations, however, the choice of speech form is imprecise. For example, in the case of requests, the choice of polite form is more rarely made than in the case of neurotypical children or people (e.g.: "another sweet" is preferred to "can I have another sweet?").

**Notes :**

## Slide n°11



### 3 – Organising the topic of conversation



Essential for interpersonal communication



Very few studies and only on small groups

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**Content:**

In a conversation, participants identify a topic of mutual interest about which they exchange ideas.

This type of behaviour has been studied very little in people with IDD.

Researches on adults with IDD suggest that the organisation of the topic of conversation is well developed.

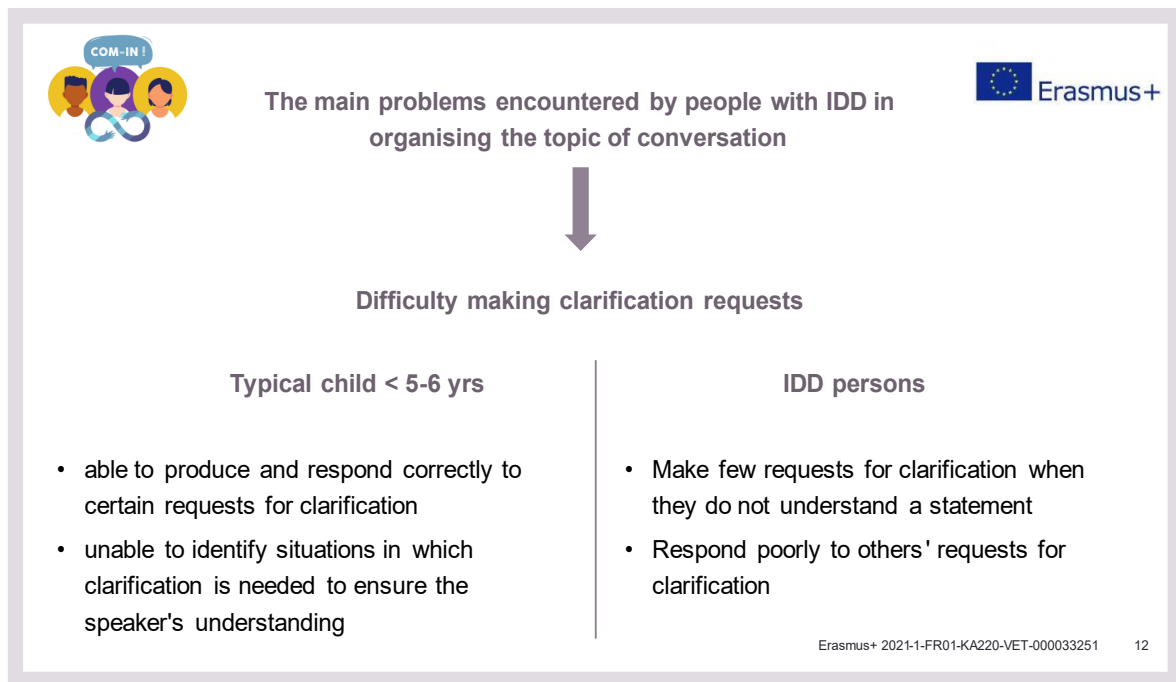
The work is based on calculating the consecutive number of turns of speech on the same subject.

Analysis of the content of the exchanges the use a lot of interjections and fillers (for example, oh, mm, hmm, etc.) to maintain interaction.

These productions have no semantic meaning and provide no information about the subject of the conversation. In fact, IDDerS maintain the interaction but most often fail to advance the topic of conversation and the exchange of ideas.

**Notes :**

## Slide n°12



### Content:

When they do not understand the content of the exchange or its objective, they very rarely make requests for clarification (e.g. ask questions, request rephrasing, etc.).

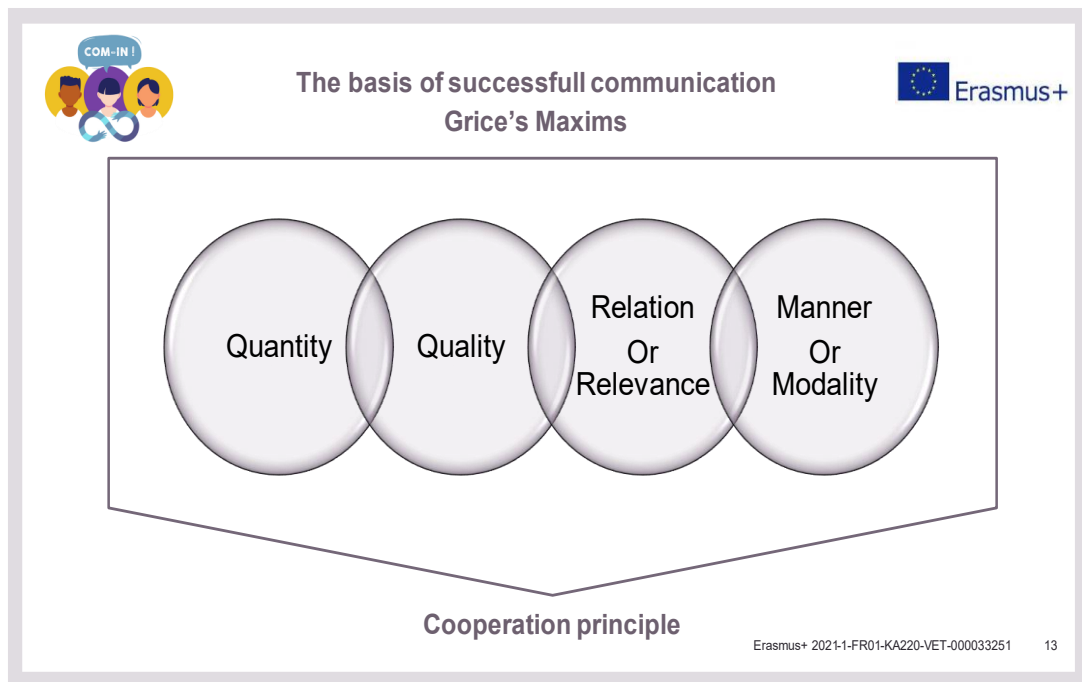
The difficulty in managing acts of communication and maintaining a conversation in a constructive and informative manner is undoubtedly because understanding an utterance is not just a matter of understanding what is said explicitly: we must consider the implicit content of any communicative intervention, a content that is only accessible by recovering the speaker's intention.

### Notes :





## Slide n°13



### Content:

Grice (1979) introduces the notion of intention in communication and develops four principles of communication that the speaker follows to communicate with an interlocutor. These are commonly referred to as Grice's Maxims.

Effective participation in the conversation must also take account of the various principles (maxims) governing relations between participants: (1) maxim of quantity, (2) maxim of quality, (3) maxim of relation or relevance and (4) maxim of manner or modality.

Each time an utterance is produced, the speaker and the receiver must cooperate to move the exchange towards a common goal: the transmission of information.





The speaker and receiver implicitly consider that the other respects the principle of cooperation.

Communication is effective and the rules of the communicative act are respected when: all the necessary and sufficient information for understanding what is being said is provided, the speaker expresses it clearly, what is being said is accurate and relevant to the topic of conversation.


In some cases, they however must make assumptions about the meaning of what is said and fill in potential gaps in information by making inferences.

**Notes :**

## Slide n°14



### Cooperation principle – Adjustment to the general direction of the conversation



If I'm asked to take part in a ball game. I am free to accept or refuse. If I accept, I must listen to the rules of the game before I can take part in the activity.

→ my interventions must be made at the right moment in the conversation

**Incorrect:** interrupt the instructor's explanations or speak at the same time as my playmates

**Correct:** wait until the end of the explanation to ask a question or ask for repetition

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**Content:**




From this point of view, the basis of successful communication rests on a principle of cooperation. From this point of view, the basis of successful communication rests on a principle of cooperation: each of the participants in the conversation endeavours to make a rational and cooperative contribution to the discourse to facilitate the interpretation of the statements.

**Notes :**

## Slide n°15



### Maxim of Quantity– Don't give too much or too little information



Jean is amused and laughs. He tells his parents about his day and wants to explain that he and his friends have been playing football and that when the ball was kicked too hard, it landed outside the play area in the neighbour's garden.

**Incorrect:** It was too hard, so the ball fell into the flowers.

→ Jean's intervention contains too little information for his parents to understand the situation and laugh with him

**Correct:** We played football at school, and I shot too hard and the ball landed in the neighbour's flowers.

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## Content:

Each speaker should give as much information as necessary and no more. Insufficient information or a lack of information is detrimental to the conversation, just as much more information than necessary can also be


detrimental to the conversation. The conversation can deviate towards unimportant details, or the participants can be led to erroneous conclusions

**Notes :**

## Slide n°16



**Maxims of Quality and Relation – Don't say anything false or irrelevant**



The educator asks Jean, who has put the cookery book away in the kitchen after the baking activity. Jean had not taken part in the cooking activity and so could not answer the question.

**Incorrect:** Anna took it away. It's on the table.

→ Jean's comment is irrelevant: (1) it does not answer the question and (2) he cannot answer it because he wasn't taking part to the activity.

**Correct:** I don't know I didn't take part in the activity.

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## Content:

Any contribution to the conversation must meet the conditions of truthfulness and soundness. This implies that each participant in the conversation must be sincere and speak with good reason. In other words, participants must have good reasons for saying what they say and evidence to support their statements.




Notes :

## Slide n°17



**Maxim of Modality/manner – Be clear, avoid ambiguity, be brief and orderly**



Jean tells his parents that he has been talking to his friends Paul and James and that James has invited him to his birthday party.

**Incorrect:** I met Paul and James. He invited me to his birthday party.  
→ We don't know who the pronoun "he" refers to. There is therefore some ambiguity in the text, since "he" can refer to Paul or James.

**Correct:** I met Paul and James. James invited me to his birthday party.

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## Content:

For communication to be effective, it is important to communicate clearly and avoid any unnecessary ambiguity or complexity.

Notes :



## Slide n°18



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### Content:

### Notes :

